

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-10 OMB-01 AID-05 SAM-01

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /092 W

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R 061332Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1238

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USUN NEW YORK 0734

USCINCEUR

S E C R E T TUNIS 0043

USCINCEUR ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SS, TS, AG, MO, MR

SUBJ: TUNISIANS WORRIED OVER ALGERIAN INTENTIONS

REF : TUNIS 7336

1. SUMMARY: ALGERIAN/TUNISIAN RELATIONS HAVE DETERIORATED AS A RESULT OF GOT POLICY ON SPANISH SAHARA. TUNISIAN LEADERS ARE APPARENTLY GROWING CONCERNED THAT ALGERIAN HOSTILITY, MANIFESTED IN PROPAGANDA AND IN SUPPORT GIVEN TO TUNISIAN OPPOSITION FIGURES, MAY TAKE A MILITARY TURN. GOT REACTION SO FAR HAS INCLUDED PRESS GUIDANCE TO IGNORE SITUATION TO EXTENT POSSIBLE, AND THERE SEEMS TO BE EMERGING A POLICY LINE THAT TUNISIA REALLY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SAHARA SITUATION. WE HAVE HEARD THERE IS TALK WITHIN GOT OF SEEKING FRENCH AND/OR AMERICAN GUARANTEES OF ASSISTANCE IN EVENT OF

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ALGERIAN ATTACK. END SUMMARY.

2. TUNISIAN/ALGERIAN RELATIONS ARE STILL OFFICIALLY NORMAL BUT DESCRIBED BY ALGERIAN OFFICIALS HERE AS FROSTY. OUR OFFICIAL TUNISIAN CONTACTS HAVE NOT RAISED SUBJECT WITH US AND HAVE TENDED TO BELITTLE RUMORS OF GOT CONCERN. INCREASINGLY, HOWEVER, WE ARE PICKING UP STORIES THAT TUNISIAN LEADERSHIP IS GENUINELY WORRIED. WHILE THEY APPARENTLY HAVE NO INTELLIGENCE REPORTS OF ACTUAL ALGERIAN MILITARY DESIGNS AGAINST TUNISIA, THEY SEE THE LOGIC OF SITUATION AS OBLIGING BOUMEDIENE'S GOVERNMENT, WHICH THEY THINK SIGNIFICANTLY WEAKENED RECENTLY, TO WORK ITS WAY CLEAR OF CONFRONTATION WITH MOROCCO, AFTER WHICH ALGERIANS WOULD TURN IN WRATH ON MORE EASILY HANDLED TUNISIA.

3. THE QADHAFI/BOUMEDIENE RAPPROACHMENT HAS UNDOUBTEDLY FUELED TUNISIAN CONCERN, AS HAVE CONTINUING ALGERIAN PROPAGANDA ATTACKS AND REPORTS OF INCREASED SUPPORT ACCORDED BY ALGIERS TO TUNISIAN OPPOSITION LEADERS INCLUDING BOTH MASMOUDI AND BEN SALAH. NOT FAR IN THE BACKGROUND IS FACT THAT GOT CONTINUES TO HARBOR FUGITIVE LIBYAN MINISTER UMAR MUHAYSHI ON WHOM QADHAFI WOULD DEARLY LOVE TO LAY HANDS.

4. LATEST REPORT OF DETERIORATING SITUATION IS RUMOR THAT SOME 300 (OR 500) TUNISIAN TEACHERS HAVE BEEN EXPELLED FROM ALGERIA.

5. ONE GOT REACTION AFTER CONCLUDING THAT ITS SAHARA POLICY HAD GOTTEN DANGEROUSLY OUT OF HAND HAS BEEN TO SUPPRESS STATEMENTS OF GOT POSITION AND EVEN NEWS OF DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SITUATION. PRESS GUIDANCE HAS BEEN HANDED DOWN TO MAKE AS LITTLE MENTION POSSIBLE OF ALGERIA, LIBYA AND SPANISH SAHARA ITSELF. OVER PAST WEEK VERY LITTLE HAS APPEARED. EVEN OULD DADDAH'S OVERNIGHT VISIT OF JANUARY 1 AND 2 WAS COVERED BY PRESS IN TERMS TO THE EFFECT THAT THE VISITOR HAD BEEN FULLY SATISFIED WITH HIS TALKS HERE WHICH CONSISTED OF A "TOUR D'HORIZON OF THE SITUATION IN OUR REGION AND IN THE ARAB WORLD." INDEPENDENT DAILY LE TEMPS JANUARY 3 RATHER WICKEDLY ADDED, "AT NO POINT IN HIS STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS DID THE MAURITANIAN CHIEF OF STATE MENTION THE WESTERN SAHARA WHICH WOULD NEVERTHELESS SEEM TO BE THE PRINCIPAL CURRENT PRE-SECRET

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OCCUPATION OF ALGERIA, MOROCCO AND MAURITANIA." FON MIN CHATTI LAST ADDRESSED SUBJECT IN PUBLIC, AS FAR AS WE AWARE, IN PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET DEBATE DECEMBER 20. HE SAID, "WE HAVE NO DISPUTE WITH ALGERIA, SO FAR AS WE KNOW," BUT WENT ON TO MENTION "A SIMPLE DIFFERENCE OF VIEWS" ON THE SAHARA QUESTION.

6. BOURGUIBA RECEIVED OULD DADDAH IN HIS DRESSING GOWN, PRESUMABLY BECAUSE BOURGUIBA HAS BEEN SOMEWHAT ILL LATELY

(SEPTTEL). HOWEVER A WELL-INFORMED PRESS CONTACT WITHIN THE GOT ESTABLISHMENT IS PUTTING OUT STORY THAT DRESSING GOWN IS A DIPLOMATIC ONE, INTENDED TO SIGNAL THAT OULD DADDAH IS JUST AN OLD FRIEND, AND HIS VISIT NOT REALLY ONE ON DIPLOMATIC BUSINESS. THE PHOTO TAKEN OF THEIR MEETING IS THUS INTENDED TO BUTTRESS A NOTION THAT TUNISIA REALLY HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH SAHARA AFFAIRS AT ALL. (THE FACT THAT THE PHOTO WAS BLOCKED FROM PUBLICATION FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, APPARENTLY WHILE GOT WAS MAKING UP ITS MIND HOW TO PLAY FACT OF THEN UNANNOUNCED PRESIDENTIAL ILLNESS, IS INCONSISTENT WITH THIS EXPLANATION, BUT THIS DOES NOT DETRACT FROM VALIDITY OF PRESUMPTION THAT OUR CONTACT WAS ACCURATELY PASSING ON GOT-INSPIRED POLICY STATEMENT.)

7. WE HAVE HEARD STORIES THAT GOT LEADERS ARE THINKING OF SEEKING GREAT POWER SUPPORT, SPECIFICALLY FRENCH AND/OR AMERICAN PROMISES TO COME TO TUNISIA'S DEFENSE SHOULD ALGERIA LAUNCH AN ATTACK. IN THIS CONNECTION WE NOTE FONMIN CHATTI PAID BRIEF VISIT TO PARIS DECEMBER 22 AND 23. PRESS COVERAGE HERE OF VISIT WAS ANODYNE, QUOTING CHATTI AS SAYING HIS TALKS WITH SAUVAGNARGUES CONSTITUTED A TOUR D'HORIZON IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AGREEMENT REACHED DURING GISCARD'S VISIT HERE THAT THE TWO FOREIGN MINISTERS WOULD KEEP IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER CONCERNING THE EVOLUTION OF BILATERAL RELATIONS AND AN EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON INTERNATIONAL PROBLEMS OF THE HOUR. PERHAPS ONLY COINCIDENTALLY, TUNIS PAPERS FOR SAME DAY, DECEMBER 23, NOTED THAT GOT ABMASSADOR TO FRANCH MET WIT FRENCH DEFENSE MINISTER THE SAME DAY CHATTI WAS IN PARIS. IT IS TEMPTING TO SPECULATE THAT CHATTI'S TRIP, WHICH HAD NOT BEEN FORECAST HERE, WAS PRIMARILY DESIGNED TO FEEL OUT FRENCH RE GOT'S GROWING FEAR OF ALGERIAN INTENTIONS.

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